

INTEGRATING SOF INTO JOINT WARFIGHTING

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OPERATION Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan thrust special operations forces (SOF) into the spotlight of the U.S. military and the world. Despite this attention, these quiet professionals are only part of the U.S. Armed Forces team. They are members of a joint team made up of all military forces, along with the other elements of national power, and many multinational partners.

This article addresses many of the areas that SOF is pursuing to gain greater integration within this team. We have limited the scope of the article in several key areas. To stay focused on integration, we do not discuss the capabilities and limitations of SOF. We also do not discuss two key elements of SOF—psychological operations forces and civil affairs forces. Finally, we do not go into detail on integration within the interagency and multinational arena.

The article addresses theater SOF, the role of a theater special operations command (SOC), employment options for employment of a joint special operations task force (JSOTF), and how full integration of SOF within a joint force enhances operations.

Theater SOF and the Role of SOC

The regional combatant commander (RCC) has combatant command of assigned SOF in the theater, with operational control (OPCON) exercised for the most part by the theater SOC. The theater service component commands exercise administrative control (ADCON) of their respective service SOF for common service type activities.

The SOC commander is normally the supporting commander and provides SOF for employment by the RCCs. He might also be designated a supported

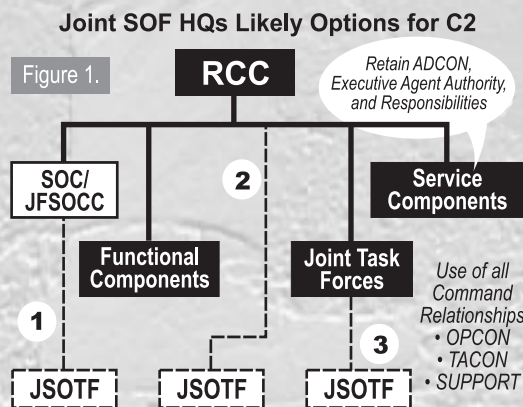
[SOFs are] high-demand and low-density forces that are often given politically sensitive or operationally complex high-risk missions. These missions demand special operations expertise in planning and execution. This requires the SOC to maintain a theater-strategic perspective focused on condition setting, while maintaining agility to respond to emergent requirements.

commander in certain situations by the secretary of defense to conduct or coordinate operations.

Each of the RCCs has a theater SOC. The SOC commander is normally an Army or Air Force brigadier general or a Navy rear admiral. These SOC commanders have three major roles similar to those of the theater-service component commanders. The SOC commanders have OPCON of attached and assigned SOF within the area of responsibility (AOR), advise the RCC and staff on employment of SOF, and when warranted, form operational headquarters to conduct special operations.

In every theater, SOF, like other elements of the Armed Forces, conduct operations throughout the RCC's AOR. Because of their training, equipping, and experience, these forces often provide the RCC

with a presence as global scouts throughout the AOR. They are, however, high-demand and low-density forces that are often given politically sensitive or operationally complex high-risk missions. These missions demand special operations expertise in planning and execution. This requires the SOC to maintain a theater-strategic perspective focused on condition setting,



More than ever before, the RCCs are concentrating on focused theater security cooperation and condition setting in the AOR to support national interests and potential military operations. This preparation of the battlespace consists of both intelligence and operational activities.

while maintaining agility to respond to emergent requirements. This necessitates SOF to operate under centralized planning and control to maintain strategic and operational agility and to ensure mission success.

Theater SOF Employment Options

Excluding the psychological operations and civil affairs units, SOF are commonly employed in three ways. The RCC might continue to command SOF through the theater SOC. The SOC can either directly control SOF in a joint special operations functional component command role or form a subordinate JTF (that is, a JSOTF) to control SOF for a specific period or in a specific operational area. The SOC might be designated as either a supported or supporting commander vis-à-vis an RCC-designated functional component or JTF to conduct operations in the AOR.

The RCC also might exercise direct control of a JSOTF if necessary. This situation might occur when the RCC wants to maintain direct control of highly sensitive operations or when the RCC requires a high degree of agility from the SOF in response to rapidly evolving situations elsewhere in the AOR.

The RCC, with the SOC commander's recommendation, might also opt to attach SOF in the form of an established JSOTF under the control of a subordinate JTF. However, this control might not always be absolute. The RCC might choose to retain some SOF assets under OPCON of the SOC for theater-wide employment. This would give him the agility to anticipate and respond to other requirements in the AOR. The RCC also might limit tasking authority of attached SOF assets for specific purposes within the capability of the JTF to control.

An important organizational consideration for all of these employment options is that the employing headquarters has the special operations expertise and systems to support the planning, con-

trol, and operational support of SOF. This expertise ensures that SOF is best employed within existing capabilities to support the joint warfight.

The typical JSOTF organization parallels that of most other JTFs. It has service force commanders like any other joint force. ADCON lines still exist for service responsibilities. There are also similarities on the air side. The JSOAC is functionally organized just as the JFACC is for an RCC or JTF commander. Subordinate task forces of the JSOTF are organized on either a functional basis (for reconnaissance or direct action) or geographic basis (by directing their focus to certain portions of the joint operations area to best conduct operations). SOF has experience working in the coalition and interagency environment. Coalition operations might be integrated at the tactical level or in more of a parallel command structure dependent on the nation involved; amount of authority delegated from the coalition force's government leadership; the capability and proficiency of the forces; and the mission and environment. SOF and the interagency also have experience working together. Both understand the value of unity of effort, and they work together toward common goals without worrying about achieving pure unity of command.

Taking the above options for employment of SOF in a theater, the RCC might employ a progression of organizations as he addresses the full range of military operations. It might start with a peacetime organization with the SOC and other components supporting theater security cooperation.

In a crisis, the SOC can quickly form a small, tailored JTF, normally SOF-centric to provide rapid crisis response. The SOC is inherently joint and are organized, equipped, and trained to the task of rapidly forming a JSOTF. The SOC can also perform as a lead JTF (such as the JTF-510 model in Pacific Command) to develop the situation as the RCC is forming a larger, more robust JTF. At a later point, the SOF-centric JTF can be designated a JSOTF and subordinated to the larger JTF. The

standing joint force headquarters, currently being developed by the U.S. Joint Forces Command with the RCCs, provides the RCC and prospective JTF commanders an additional capability for command or augmentation throughout this progression.

Battlespace preparation. More than ever before, the RCCs are concentrating on focused theater

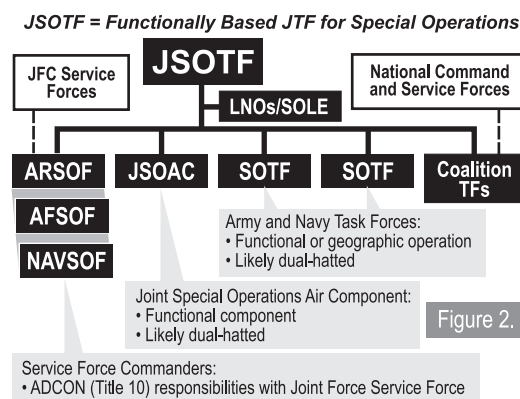
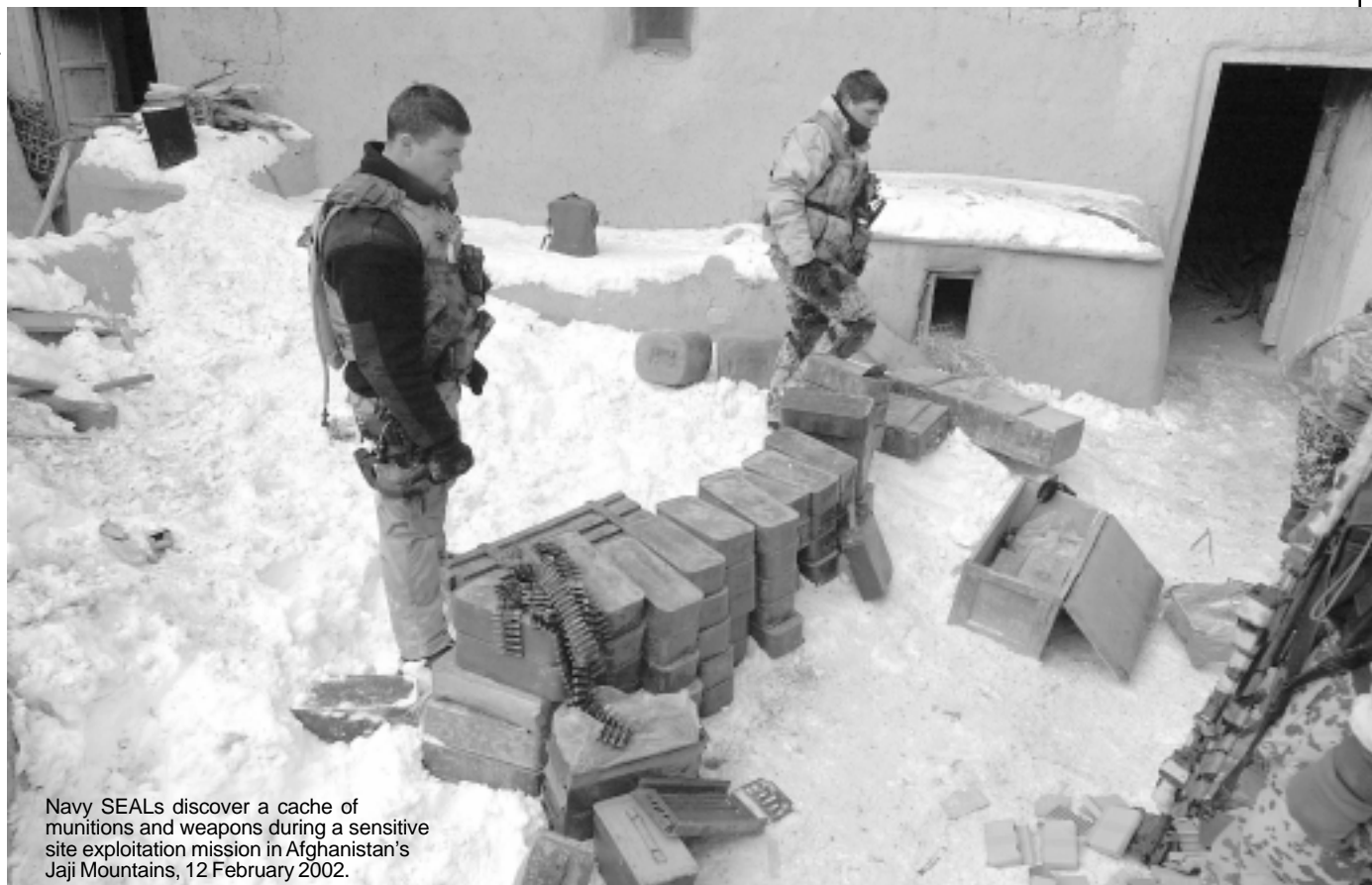


Figure 2.



Navy SEALs discover a cache of munitions and weapons during a sensitive site exploitation mission in Afghanistan's Jaji Mountains, 12 February 2002.

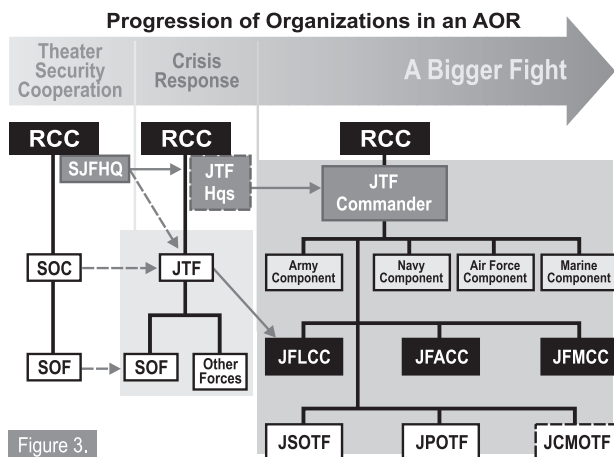
SOF must be well integrated into the battlespace. The key to success is the interrelationship of specified areas of operation, the authority of the designated supported commander, and how SOF maintains SOF expertise in planning and execution of SO missions that satisfy the supported commander's needs. Typically, a special operations command and control element or Navy special warfare task unit is collocated with the supported force commander to control subordinate forces within the respective AO.

security cooperation and condition setting in the AOR to support national interests and potential military operations. This preparation of the battlespace consists of both intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) and operational preparation of the battlefield (OPB) activities. SOF can support other government agencies in IPB activities and conduct OPB under RCC control. In this latter role, SOF conducts pre-crisis activities to gain access and understanding of the AOR and conducts advance force operations to set conditions for anticipated military operations. It is important for potential JTF commanders, staffs, and components to understand the SOF's role in the IPB and OPB. SOF and government agencies will likely be in the area as a JTF builds up and

as forces deploy and prepare for operations.

Integration in employment. The theme of integration versus deconfliction has relevance in the SOF community. While SOF still receives key tasks from the higher joint force commander (JFC), synergy from lateral collaboration and the meeting of peer component needs has increased in accordance with priorities established by the higher commander.

Integration in planning. SOF subject matter expertise is essential at all headquarters that work with SOF. SOF remains an advocate of the liaison officer (LNO) performing as the JSOTF commander's personal representative at the gaining headquarters. Physical LNO and virtual presence (through newly developed collaboration tools) are



important to optimize integration and effectiveness of the force. A stumbling block in the past has occurred when the LNO is relegated to performing traditional staff activities such as updating the situation map or monitoring JSOTF activities. These are functions and responsibilities of the headquarters staff; these SO-related responsibilities are JTF SO staff-element duties, wholly different from the plans-centric and commander-representative functions

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of an LNO. The LNO plays an important role in facilitating supported/supporting command relationships with adjacent components by ascertaining and assisting in the supported commander's staff planning. Time and again, component LNOs to the JSOTF have significantly enhanced situational awareness and integration of planning and operations.

Integration in the battlespace. SOF must be well integrated into the battlespace. The key to success is the interrelationship of specified areas of operation, the authority of the designated supported commander, and how SOF maintains expertise in planning and executing SO missions that satisfy the supported commander's needs.

Typically, a special operations command and control element (SOCCE) or Navy special warfare task unit (NSWTU) is collocated with the supported force commander to control subordinate forces within the respective AO. It provides direct support to the supported commander and exercises tactical control of subordinate forces. These supported and supporting command relationships work well to enhance the joint fight.

The SOCCE and NSWTU, with appropriate LNOs, make the supported/supporting command relationship effective and agile. This is not the only way to work command and control (C2), but it is a

good starting point. As always, the JFC has the authority to organize to best accomplish the mission. SOF reporting also is integrated to enhance joint operations. Reporting is performed within the parameters established by the supported commander and within his specified timeliness and content parameters. This often entails a SOCCE, NSWTU, or the special operations liaison element to directly terminate an operational unit's communications, which can reduce sensor-to-shooter times to minutes.

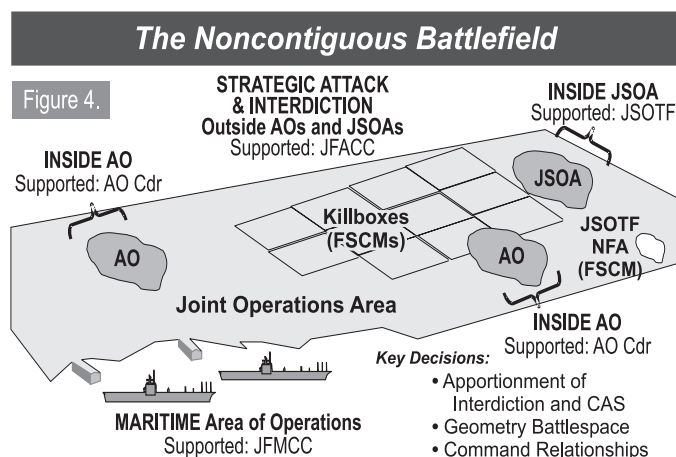
Targeting and fires. As stated in Joint Publication (JP) 3-09, *Doctrine for Joint Fire Support* (12 May 1998), designation of areas of operation and supported commanders are key to effective and responsive fires. This is true on a linear, contiguous battlefield and on a noncontiguous battlefield.

The noncontiguous environment has many associated challenges in the orchestration of fires and maneuver, much as in Afghanistan. In the noncontiguous environment, battlespace geometry and fire support coordinating measures (FSCM) are still needed. Through insights gained from OEF, the JFC has several key decisions to make. First is an upfront prioritization and apportionment to ensure that maneuver and fires commanders are provided the resources to accomplish their missions. Second is the designation of areas of operation or joint special operations areas that give authority and responsibility to ground force commanders. These areas might be much smaller than previously seen. They also might be gridded and overlain with kill boxes that are activated and deactivated as forces move. Last is designation of supported and supporting commanders to fix accountability and provide requisite respective authority for operations and coordination.

SOF has been working with the joint community and the services on how to improve support time-sensitive targeting. SOF has found that reporting can be quite responsive, even in over-the-horizon reporting. SOF and the services are still working additional TTPs in the area of terminal-guidance operations. This is especially true with the munitions on the

battlefield today. The Army and the Air Force also have established rapid-fires clearance processes within the joint-fires element at the JSOTF. Key to this is accurate force tracking and common operational pictures.

Force tracking. Force tracking is taking on additional importance in noncon-



tiguous and fast-moving operations. Friendly and enemy force tracking and dissemination are important to mission success and in preventing fratricide. It is a continuing challenge for the JFC to establish a clear command operations picture architecture and to specify the timeliness of manually and automatically provided feeds. In most cases, SOF provides full versus discrete (or filtered) feeds to the COP. We have found that fratricide caused by a lack of common situational awareness is a greater threat to Army personnel than is the potential compromise of SOF locations over these secure COP mechanisms.

Logistics and communications. SOF relies heavily on the services for much of its service support. This includes base operations support, force protection, and common services such as fuel and rations. Funding also is a complex business on today's battlefield. JFCs and their staff must be familiar with Title 50-type funding, especially when working with and supporting indigenous forces.

SOF communications are more interoperable with the rest of the joint force than ever before, using the Secure Internet Protocol Network and the Joint Worldwide Intelligence Communications System to pass information. The JFC must develop the communications and multilevel security policies to interoperate with coalition partners. Multilevel security is often the greatest challenge for both SOF and the JFC.

Risk and Mission Approval Authorities

In recent exercises and operations, the joint force commander often faced a dilemma in balancing the risk of accomplishing strategic objectives with the risk to the forces conducting the operation. This relationship of strategic to tactical risk might in fact be inversely proportional; crafting the operation to afford low risk to the force might incur unacceptable risk to the overall strategic objective. Another observation is that as tactical risk increases, strategic risk also increases because of a greater possibility of tactical failure. An example of this is in the arrangement of operations. Sequential operations might allow for lower tactical risk, but at the risk of the target getting away or conducting asymmetric attacks elsewhere to attain his objectives. Simultaneous operations might have a higher risk to the force because of the "bridge too far" aspect but of-

ten get to strategic objectives more quickly.

Special operations forces can help mitigate this dilemma by operating at the high end of the tactical risk domain. This brings us back to JFC decisions of how to mitigate tactical risk and the delegation of mission-approval authority. Delineation of mission-approval levels allows designated subordinates to operate within the commander's intent and to take advantage of rapidly emerging situations on the battlefield.

One of the best ways for JFCs to articulate mission-approval levels is through the use of a mission-approval matrix, which allows the JFC to assign the appropriate mission-approval authority based on a number of criteria: political, economic, informational sensitivities, risk to the force in terms of mission accomplishment, use of low-density assets, and collateral damage. The type of mission also is a factor, depending on whether it is a new or recurring type of mission. This approval process allows subordinates to work within the commander's intent while still retaining the appropriate controls necessary for oversight.

Joint warfare is exactly that; it is joint, not component warfare. SOF is one of the team members in the joint team. Joint warfare is about working together to get the mission accomplished. Gone are the stovepipe days where one had to own a force (for example, OPCON or TACON) to get support and unity of command. With the increase in use of the supported and supporting command relationship, synergy, trust, and confidence has grown between the members of the joint force.

We have noted some key areas of emphasis that are continually reinforced in both exercises and real-world operations. A key emphasis area is more definitive prioritization of supporting efforts to ensure that everyone knows the priorities and allocates their efforts to support the joint fight versus only their component operations. A structured, collaborative environment can assist in the development of the best concept of operation by gaining the insights of all the players. This structured and robust collaborative environment can allow for the exchange of information and intent among the JFC, his staff, the components, and also between JTF warfighters. What is important is determining acceptable risk and defining clear lanes of authority for mission approval. **MR**

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